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ABSTRACT

High school journalists are beginning to look beyond the restrictions of reporting the news of the campus to the larger responsibility of reporting the news of the community. Such a functional approach to news gathering can help school journalists to see the relationship between their school and the community and to discover that learning how to cover one is training for covering the other in a later career. If students see how schools function in the total society and incorporate that into their concepts of news, there may be less of the split and historic contradiction between student and professional journalism. As the borders between campus and community dissolve, journalism advisers might use their powers of control and guidance to test new approaches to news gathering. The campus as a set of beats, a locale of experts, and news course of general public interest can be utilized to show students that school and community are not separate and that the campus is a prototype of the world. (Author/FL)

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COMMUNITY COVERAGE BY THE HIGH SCHOOL PRESS:
--Beyond the Borders of Campus Microcosm ?--

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COMMUNITY COVERAGE BY THE HIGH SCHOOL PRESS:
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While high school teachers, advisers and journalists worrry about failures to teach language and writing skills,[1] there is a second worry among many that the mental boundaries of community may still be narrowly limited to the campus, despite a world made smaller in the 1980s by communications and international interdependence.

In the 1960s, it was the pressure of community race relations and the civil rights movement which caused the high school press to respond beyond its borders, so in the 1970s and 1980s, it is the policies of Washington and city hall which may affect school bussing, school lunches, and coinage for the vending machines; and Middle East oil affects students facing the draft and gas to get to the school parking lot.

Previous fears expressed by the Commission of Inquiry Into High School Journalism in 1973 were that high school journalism should be reformed because it had "not reflected the mosaic of American Society".[2] Similarly, the National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education noted the "new student body" of the era and said "The larger problems of American Society are reflected in high schools" where there was a need to train for adult responsibility and bring school and community into touch with each other.

Although there are mixed assessments on the present status and evolution of community orientation by high school journalism, there is evidence the challenge is not being ignored and is high on the list of debated priorities and directions. One advocate of journalists going beyond the high school campus into the political issues of the larger community suggests that the student press fails, although "teachers impress upon students the importance of political commitment in a democracy, (but) students are trained to be citizens in a situation devoid of politics."[3]

Perhaps the most extensive survey of coverage beyond campus "indicates that relatively few school news media provide systematic coverage of timely and relevant ideas, events and problems in politics." "Doubtless", the report says, "there are advisers who feel more comfortable in publishing news media similar to those of the 1930s and 1940s. They avoid depth coverage through investigation and interpretation. The high school is an island with no relevant news beyond its shores."[4]

Other observers and evidence hints that the high school press is moving beyond its borders. One notes that "in the past year, students have thumbed their noses at the old favorites--school spirit, littered campuses, and exhortations of all sorts for better behavior and personal growth--for more pressing topics: the hostages in Iran, the collapse of detente, the horror of Cambodia."[5] By the end of the 1970s, there were signs students were still wrestling with how to adapt to the "new journalism",[6] and teachers were seeing student journalists as preparing for adult life.[7]

That threshold of involvement in the larger world extended fro.. student consumer reporting on action lines and price comparisons,[8] to scooping the professional media on an international news story.[9] Perhaps more significantly, the student press had expanded into responsible investigative reporting on community problems "as a credit to themselves and a contribution to their communities".[10]

In the more traditional forms of the feature story, which seem to change with the climate of society,[11] the past decade shows that high school newspapers made greater use of critical approaches, ran more adult-oriented stories, and showed greater concern for community problems,[12] and not just the problems of youth. The list is an agenda of universal issues in modern urban society:[13]

> "...neglected or battered children finding hope in special nurseries; women working through the physical and psychological trauma of rape...drinking and the drunk; and victims living through a divorce...saving electricity by using wood-burning stoves; restoring old homes and whole communities; recycling to relieve waste problems...smoking, alcoholism and the rehabilitation of drug abusers; student dating practices; teenage pregnancy...teen marriages, venereal disease; phobias and superstitions; loneliness, depression, despair and mental diseases; unemployment problems..."

One survey of advisers to high school publications indicates that student newspspers are covering issues beyond school life ranging from energy, desegregation and traffic to pollution, capital punishment and military expenditures.[14] Coverage of such issues shows students that "the world does not begin and end inside the school walls. The 'school' newspaper may be transformed into one that functions within the community and beyond."[15]

The problems of students going beyond the campus to cover community issues are many. Sometimes they are not motivated and do not see relevance issues or lack the time and skills. Other problems may relate to fear or the practice of administrative censorship as well as previous or current coverage by the local press.[16]

One way to encourage this emerging blend of the communities of campus and larger community is to help students see that, firstly, the campus is a microcosm of the community beyond. Their functions are not greatly different: campus form and structure, architecture and design are like the skeleton of the human body. Its muscle is its economic support from the donors or the general public, making and maintaining the structure. It's like the real estate/business beat.

Its stability is also its health, mental and physical, like many other organisms. the student infirmary, nurse, physical education and nutrition. In addition to maintenance, the campus, like outside society, must circulate and move through some form of transportation: pedestrians, elevators, autos, bicycles, mass transit. Items for the transportation reporter.

Another function common to both campus and community is order and a system of government: the student body president, organizational officers, power relationships with faculty. That's the political beat. Then, there is the closely related function of human relations: how various interests and conflicts are resolved and adjudicated so that the general organism survives or changes and adjusts.

Two other basic functions student journalists should have in mind are those of communication to "oil" the total process of the

student or adult community; and the role of leisure and entertainment--what the organism does when it is not working and when it is in a state of rest. And finally, student journalists should see that the natural environment is a universal function in all man-made communities in school or society. The plumbing must work or even judges can't do their work; and if the waste paper is not collected, teachers might well suffocate!

If students were taught this functional approach to community, then there might not be any split or contradiction seen between covering school and community. Unfortunately, the traditional approach in the professional journalistic community is to cover buildings rather than functions, and to treat community as geography rather than as issues and problems which cut across such artificial boundaries.

Indeed both high school and professional journalism outside need to organize news-gathering around these basic community functions rather than around the building mentality which also generates a dependence on events in specific places (often crises or managed news) instead of focus on issues. (That paramecium in the high school biology class is like the community needing a nerve system, circulation, digestion, excretion, and reproduction as an ongoing entity. Growth, conflict, change and innovation and adaptation all take place within that frame.)

With this mental image in the high school (or professional media) newsroom, there is both a better chance to organize beats (as suggested here) and a way to organize specialists, special pages or departments, or even a way for a general assignment reporter to develop a mental

"filing system" for the total community. Just as adult journalists should not perpetuate a segmented, fractured notion of news based on whether news comes from city hall, the courthouse, White House or United Nations, neither should high school journalists think that the mere source of news (e.g. the school nurse or campus police) is separate from nutrition, mental stress, or sex education classes.

Deans and superintendents dealing with truancy, vandalism and cheating are not actually separate from the "geography" of job stress in the homes and economy, campus architecture, and religious and moral anchors in churches and temples. Traffic officers dealing with parking, walkways, elevators, and other transit problems are not greatly removed from the sources -nd supplies of energy needed to move both people and materials. Student journalists might be taught that such apparent different areas as campus shrubs, insecticides, bats and pigeons, are not widely separated from the total natural environment of waste disposal, pollution, parks, fountains and other aspects of the "built" environment. The relationships are numerous.

If students can be taught that high school journalism is a part of their total education, and that it is not different from any other journalism, then the meaningless split between campus and community might be healed. Reporters may learn not to depend solely on police for news of crime. Covering accidents might become only one part of covering transportation. Hospitals and schools are only one part of education and health. Not all government and order emanate from the buildings where law enforcement officials work. And not all recreation is spectator sports, but participatory sports matter too, despite

the domination by the former on sports desks generally.

Student journalists might be taught that news of weather, for example, should be to inform and help, and not just to entertain or boost local tourism. People need news to help prevent the crises defined as news--after the fact! "Preventive journalism" could aid those needing information to solve problems before they arise or become unmanageable. Consumer reporting is a sign of this trend.

The need for anticipating events and news is most evident in sports and political reporting, and perhaps a functional approach to news could help readers and viewers deal with problems in transportation, the economy, health, and nature. That new parking lot may pollute the air, use more scarce gas, endanger pedestrians, reduce exercise and trees for mental reflection in the shade. Drops in school taxes may affect teacher salaries; fast food and junk snacks may hurt digestion and study habits; and abuse of antibiotics for common communicable diseases may weaken resistance to unforseen epidemics.

Once student journalists see that campus news is part of the total news scene, then they can perhaps see campus sources as experts and sources they might have evaded for reasons other than reluctance of some faculty to speak to either student or community journalists. Why not cultivate the chemistry and biology teachers when dealing with ecological problems. Sociologists on campus deal with race, alienation, social problems in classes. What better source for interviews on the same problems in town as well as on campus.

Home and business economics teachers might make their teaching clearer if asked by student journalists to analyze or comment on the

in place of mere stress on geography and sources of news. Students must have ideas as well as skills and know communities as well as communication. Advisers facing the dangers and risks of inadequate student reporting and inexperienced writers on transient staffs may have to balance that dilemma with the learning process which is often risky if it is realistic. A journalist covering the massive, impersonal, bureaucratic politics of the campus may already be experiencing a world more real than outsiders and insiders wish to admit.

What better training for the journalist in this lab of last idealism with guidance still available! Perhaps the campus is a prototype of the outside world reflected in the microcosm of the campus. In any case, the communities of both are clearly one. Both schools and countries are without walls, and some might argue that education is succeeding when it no longer isolates itself from its constituency which supports and sustains it.

The borders and boundaries between campus and community appear to be dissolving. Educators aware of that might advise student journalists that journalistic forms might follow functions of community and thereby make media more a part of the educational process.

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Footnotes

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3. Michael Plaisted, "Political Reporting Falls Short in Nation's Student Press", Quill and Scroll, Vol. 51, No. 3, February-March 1977, pp 16-20.

4. Laurence R. Campbell, "A Look at Political Reporting", Communication: Journalism Education Today, Vol. 2, Fall 1977; Also "Scope of Political Reporting", February-March 1978, Vol. 52, No. 3, Quill and Scroll, pp 7-9.

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16. Ibid.

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